

OUR LIGHT AFFLICTION

Message by
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II Cor. 4:16-18: "Therefore, we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding, eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

The Apostle Paul knew what trouble in life was. Three times, in the book of II Corinthians, he lists some of his experiences: chapter 4, chapter 6 and chapter 11.

For example, chapter 4:8f: "We are hard pressed on every side yet not crushed. We are perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body." In spite of all these, the Apostle Paul does not lose heart, become discouraged or faint. Why? Well, in this place Paul gives three reasons.

The first reason, verse 16b: "Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day." Paul, what is the outward man? In this context he defines it in verse 7 as an "earthen vessel." In chapter 5 verse 1 he calls it "our earthly house." It is evident that he is talking about the physical body, and he says it is perishing or decaying. Say, who needs proof of that? In Acts 7 Paul is called a young man who stood by as Stephen was stoned. In Philemon verse 9 he calls himself Paul, the aged, but at the most, he must have been not much over 50 years old. Yes, Paul, we agree that the physical body certainly does decay.

But what is the inward man? In Ephesians 3:16 Paul says, "strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man." The moment a person receives Christ as Saviour, the Holy Spirit enters the body of that believer to dwell. Among the Spirit's duties: He seals, guides and instructs the believer. Are you aware of the Holy Spirit's presence in your life? Paul was, and he says, "I am not yet perfect, I have not yet attained, I am not yet all that I should be and will be by the grace of God, but while my outward man is perishing, my inner spiritual life is continually being renewed."

You and I can become bitter and discouraged toward life and its problems, or we can become better because of them as the Holy Spirit draws us closer to the Lord. This does not explain our suffering, but it does tell us how to consider and use it. For your sake, then, become conscious again of the Holy Spirit in your life and let Him strengthen you.

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The second reason Paul does not lose heart is found in verse 17: "Our light affliction which is but for a moment is working for us a far more exceeding, eternal weight of glory." "Our light affliction," Paul says?

In Acts 27 we have the account of his shipwreck experience on the way to Rome. The ship is caught in a typhoon, all the goods are thrown out, the ship is stripped of everything to make it as light as possible, and yet "after many days," Luke writes, "all hope that we should be saved" was gone. A light affliction?

In II Corinthians 1 Paul writes that when he came into Asia the trouble burdened him "beyond measure, above strength" so that he "despaired even of life." Yet he says, "light affliction." How could he say that? That was because he was contrasting the trials of life with "the far more exceeding weight of glory" that is coming.

Consider the relatively short span of our life with its problems, and then think of eternity in the future and the glories of heaven, and what is prepared for us who know Christ as our Saviour by grace. Listen to the way the song writer has put it:

Oft-times the day seems long, our trials hard to bear;
We're tempted to complain, to murmur and despair;
But Christ will soon appear to catch His "own" away,
All tears forever over in God's eternal day.

Sometimes the sky looks dark, with not a ray of light;
We're tossed and driven on, no human help in sight.
But there is one in heav'n who knows our deepest care;
Let Jesus solve your problem; just go to Him in prayer.

Life's day will soon be o'er, all storms forever past.
We'll cross the great divide to glory, safe at last.
We'll share the joys of heav'n, a harp, a home, a crown.
The tempter will be banished; we'll lay our burden down.

It will be worth it all when we see Jesus.
Life's trials will seem so small when we see Christ.
One glimpse of His dear face all sorrow will erase;
So bravely run the race 'til we see Christ.

Ah, yes -- "a far more exceeding weight of glory" awaits the believer.

The third reason Paul does not lose heart is found in verse 18: "We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Don't lose sight of heaven; keep your eyes on the goal; walk by faith, not by sight.

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I like Paul's personal testimony in II Corinthians 12. He was caught into Paradise and saw things that either he was not able to describe -- they were so wonderful -- or he was not permitted to speak of them. I doubt the testimony of those who claim to have spent time in heaven and have returned to speak extensively about it. But Paul knew, and he could say in Philippians 1:23, "to depart and be with Christ is far better." Believe that! It's in the Word of God!!

Over the triple doorways of the Cathedral of Milan are three inscriptions spanning those splendid arches. On one side is carved a beautiful wreath of roses, and underneath is the legend, "All that which pleases is but for a moment." On the other side there is sculptured a cross with the words, "All that which troubles us is but for a moment." Underneath the great central entrance to the main aisle is the inscription, "That only is important which is eternal." If we realize always these three truths we will not let trifles trouble us, nor be interested so much in the passing pageants of the hour. We would live, as we do not now, for the permanent and the eternal.

Here is the text once again, "Therefore, we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding, eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." So speaks the Word of God.

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come.
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

And when this heart and flesh shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the veil
A life of joy and peace.

When we've been there ten thousand years
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we'd first begun.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the precious promises of the Word of God and the encouragement that it has therein for those who have passed from death unto eternal life by simple faith in Jesus Christ. And Lord, in whatever

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circumstance we may be found today, we pray that we may be depending upon the Holy Spirit to lead us, to guide us, to encourage us, to give us that cheer of heart, to give us that sight of the inward eye which keeps us on the goal, and to know that one of these days we shall know, even as we read from the Word of God, of those wonders and glories which Thou hast gone to prepare for us.

We pray, Lord, for one who has never had the assurance of being passed from death into life eternal. We pray that we shall grasp the truth of simply believing Christ, saying to Him, "Lord, I'm a sinner, I know You died for my sins, and I therefore confess them to Thee and believe that You'll forgive me," knowing that He has promised everlasting life.

Then for us who do know Thee, we pray that we shall not soon forget the promises of God, that we are here in this life for a witness, a witness that our Lord can take care of us here and the assurance that He will take care of us there. Grant, our Father, that in this day there will be real joy in the heart, for Thou has made this day by the victory of our Lord over sin and death and the grave. Keep us, we pray, in Jesus' precious name. Amen.